SEMINAR REPORT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTELLIGENCE PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

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As things so very often are
Intelligence won't get you far.
So be glad you've got more sense
Than you've got Intelligence

--Piet Heijn (1578-1629)

Throughout the research into the impact of intelligence on policy makers, serious questions have been raised by both intelligence producers and policy consumers concerning their respective roles in the policy review and decision process. Should they be more interactive or more insular? Should there be a doctrine or theory established to define these roles, to guide this relationship and to provide some standard to gauge its improvement, or would such an effort be labeled useless pedantry? Can historical precedent be used to establish a conceptual framework for the relationship? Is the concern about the intelligence policy relationship merely a reflection of the growing complexity of world problems and the bureaucratic systems created to handle them?

On November 20, 1979, a group of 28 people met under the auspices of the Center for the Study of Intelligence to share their views and to exchange their ideas on these questions. Participants were drawn from the intelligence and the policy communities and from academia. (A list of participants is attached) The agenda was designed to provide for a discussion of the interests and concerns of those present as they represented various interest groups within the intelligence and policy communities. The seminar was divided into two parts according to the two major aspects to be considered:

1. How we got to where we are today, with a look at whether or not the relationship functioned better in the earlier years; and

2. Whether or not we should develop a doctrine for the future, and if so, what it should be.

I. Historical Precedent and Consumer Satisfaction

It was the general consensus of those present that the intelligence producer-consumer relationship did not function better in the "old days." Today there is a greater familiarity on the part of most policy makers with respect to the

intelligence process and what it can be expected to do. The press has probably helped in this regard, although not always in a positive way. Today's policy makers are also better aware of their own requirements.

These improvements must be contrasted, however, with the existence of persistent gaps. Despite the fact that intelligence today is more sophisticated and complex than 20 or 30 years ago, policy makers still may not feel that they are better served. Policy makers today have a greater appreciation of what they ought to be getting from intelligence -- and are not. There does not seem to be a positive correlation between improved intelligence capabilities and consumer satisfaction.

Several important points emerged as this historical comparison was pursued:

--The intelligence process has often been misunderstood. According to much of the literature, intelligence is supposed to tell the policy maker what is happening or what will happen in ways that allow policy formulation and action. Intelligence, however, has become much too reactive. "Scratching only where it itches" does not provide the policy maker with any lead-time for incipient or projected events. Intelligence must do better at anticipating events.

--Within an historical dimension, the existence of change cannot be minimized. From the late 1940s until the early 1960s, U.S. foreign policy shaped and molded world events. In the last ten years, however, this process has become more reactive and intelligence needs have changed accordingly. Due in part to the tremendous speed with which a situation evolves, it becomes more difficult for policy makers to communicate what they want to know on a daily basis.

--Historically, there seem to be good periods and bad periods in the intelligence producer-consumer relationship. With our internal and external interactions going through a dynamic phase, we may presently be in a bad period.

--In the past, intelligence seemed to have more time for research, but this lead-time has disappeared. Producers face heavier pressures for analysis over a

larger array of issues on much shorter notice. Consumers themselves may simply not realize just how much intelligence is doing for them now unless they make a comparison with past years.

--Historically, policy makers have not been prone to inform intelligence about the range of policy options under consideration. Nevertheless, communication between policy makers and intelligence is important. It appears that existing means of communication are not being used properly, nor are new communication techniques being developed.

It was observed that only intelligence people seem to be writing about this doctrinal problem. Why? Are intelligence producers misunderstanding the problem or perhaps magnifying its significance? These observations touched off additional questions concerning the appropriate definition of terms:

--What exactly is meant by "consumers"? Is there some mythical whole out there, or are we instead referring to a particular subset of policy makers?

--Are we talking about all intelligence producers, are we making distinctions between national and departmental products? For example, are the problems under discussion peculiar to intelligence as a whole in relation to all prospective consumers, or are they peculiar to specific relationships, i.e. the White House and the CIA, the State Department and INR, the Department of Defense and DIA?

While the need for some clarification of the level of intelligence producer and consumer to be reached was acknowledged, there were no resolutions to these questions at the seminar. Instead, the discussion turned its focus on the problem of consumer satisfaction. Can you ever have a satisfied consumer? The following viewpoints emerged:

--Satisfaction is assumed to result when intelligence consumers get what they want from the intelligence community. Yet, they may not know what they really want. Hiding this ignorance behind the phrase, "I'll know it when I see it," magnifies a mutual sense of dissatisfaction.

--While the failures of intelligence to serve policy may be a matter of perception rather than fact, the situation cannot be corrected merely through a change in public relations or image. There is that elusive quality known as "relevance" which seems to depend in part on what the policy maker has in mind for the use of intelligence. If the intelligence producer is not privy to policy intentions, his analysis may very well fail to meet expectations.

--The most difficult cases are those where the various intelligence producers themselves disagree. In many instances the information to be analyzed is ambiguous, leading to different and perhaps contradictory interpretations. When analysts hedge by presenting different interpretations of the data, the policy maker must perforce choose from among them. There is little that intelligence producers can do to influence these choices, once the material has been presented.

It is important to distinguish between the general intelligence readership and those specific officials who asked for an analysis to be prepared and who defined the terms of reference. The majority of intelligence products are done on demand, keyed to a particular need. This is good in that it brings specific information and consumers together. This may also have some negative side-effects. Working on a narrowly focused problem may force the intelligence producer to concentrate primarily on the hill directly in front of him, leaving the road beyond it unexplored. Doing these two things simultaneously -- being responsive to a particular policy maker and his immediate needs while distributing the final product to as wide a readership as possible -- may be a cheap way to serve up intelligence and conserve manpower but its effectiveness is questionable. The end product may be well received by a handful of consumers while many others will question its utility.

The policy makers who are the most receptive to intelligence are those who have worked with it before and who therefore know better where to tap into the system effectively to get the information they need. They may perhaps even be acquainted with specific analysts. To gain this feel for

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The impact of personality on intelligence must not be overlooked.

Often it is not just what is being told to the policy maker but who is doing the telling which determines its effect.

The classic responsibility of intelligence has been that of warning, a function which usually involves the imparting of bad news. The level of receptivity to bad news is variable. Most policy makers want to be told when something bad is going to happen. But if the bad news concerns their policies, especially those already established, receptivity will tend to be negative. One piece of information is not likely to convince a policy maker that he is off the track, although a cumulative effort may cause him grudgingly to reconsider his position. Other policy makers may find themselves suddenly "too busy" to see their briefing officers after receiving a lot of bad news from them. There was some disagreement among the participants over where a greater receptivity to bad news was to be found, some believing that senior policy makers with a personal stake in the policy were not as receptive, while others felt that middle and lower level policy people were too preoccupied with short-range concerns.

Can the true value of the intelligence product be measured by the level of satisfaction on the part of the policy maker or by what he wants to see? There is often a difference between what the policy maker needs and what he wants. The intelligence producer cannot always depend on what the policy maker asks, for tailored intelligence does not necessarily deal with what is really needed. It does neither the producer nor the consumer much good to be "more confused about more important things." Intelligence producers must also make a more conscious effort to say what it is they do not know as well as what is known.

A question was raised as to why no one was looking at real or potential domestic implications of U.S. policy. Is this a serious gap in intelligence service to the policy maker? Traditionally, intelligence has provided support to consumers only in the area of foreign policy. But important issues such as energy, food and population have both foreign and domestic impacts. Despite encouragement, intelligence analysts are reluctant to consider the implications of U.S. policies on the U.S. itself. Intelligence has traditionally alerted policy makers to some development abroad which might impinge on U.S. interests, but it has not always tried to

carry this to the next stage of analysis--to examine the domestic impact of foreign activity. This leads to criticism of intelligence by policy makers that the analysis does not explain why policy makers should be worried. Not all the seminar participants were convinced that this was still a problem, citing OER as an active contributor in relating foreign problems to domestic policy.

II. A Doctrine for the Intelligence Producer-Consumer Relationship

Many of the participants were dubious about the establishment of any doctrine to govern this relationship.

--It is difficult to conceive of any single rule or set of rules that could be applicable in all situations. One cannot easily generalize about policy makers, in terms of their needs, receptivity to intelligence or their areas of responsibility. Diversity of policy maker stereotypes suggests that doctrine in a broad sense is not useful. Such a "doctrine" might in fact be more inhibiting than enlightening.

--The degree of political impact which an intelligence analyst may or may not have is a very subtle issue which cannot be manifested in bold type in a doctrine.

--The development of such a doctrine is a feckless exercise. Intelligence is much like the water company--it will hear from its consumers if they do not get their water supply or if the water comes out of the tap green.

The long accepted separation of policy from intelligence as the fundamental first principle for an intelligence producer-policy consumer doctrine is a concept borrowed from other sources (e.g. separation of church and state) which is not truly analogous. When speaking of "separation" in the former instance, it should not be taken to mean the existence of an impermeable dividing line but a distinction between two institutions. In a crude sense, the policy maker is himself both an intelligence collector and consumer. With the growth of government and the complexity of the issues which it must handle, the policy maker has been forced to delegate his intelligence functions to others. The problem is therefore one of defining the relationship of intelligence to policy without blurring the distinction between them.

It is generally accepted that the policy maker is not a very good judge of intelligence in the abstract. Whether or not he "likes" or "dislikes" a piece of intelligence does not provide an adequate evaluation. If policy makers are not the right judges and if there is no apparatus to provide some standard for guiding the quality of the product, how are the intelligence producers to know whether or not they are doing their jobs correctly?

This is a very complex question due to the disparate personalities involved as well as to the diffuse nature of the issues to which intelligence must address itself. The problem is made even more difficult by an inadequate understanding of how and where intelligence ideally should fit into the foreign policy decision-making process. Intelligence producers now rely on ad hoc forms of product evaluation. If the consumer returns for subsequent analysis, it is assumed by the producer that he was satisfied with the product.

Discussion of evaluative procedures consistently emphasized the importance of feedback from the policy maker. To be effective, this requires some constant means of two-way communication between intelligence producers and their consumers. In considering how this was to be accomplished, one participant observed that perhaps what the group was really discussing was an underlying doctrine for this relationship after all.

25X1C The overwhelming consensus was that a close working relationship, with each party mutually respectful of the boundaries of the other, is the ideal situation. Such a symbiotic relationship is possible, as exemplified by the interaction found in policy-intelligence working groups [redacted] 25X1C

25X1C [redacted] Intelligence has been able to make its best contributions in the area of analytic support in such direct working relationships without losing its objectivity. In fact, DDO often does a better job of this than NFAC. Working closely with policy makers overseas and maintaining these contacts when they return home, DDO officers are able to work the "old boy" system more successfully than analysts who do not make the effort of seeking out their policy making counterparts.

While distance is agreed to work to the detriment of intelligence, one participant felt that "closeness" between policy makers and analysts by itself does not mean much. It is the character of the relationship which is important. If the intelligence producer is not well acquainted with policy considerations, he will be unable to ask the questions which the policy maker most needs to have answered. The desire on the part of traditionalists to avoid analyzing policy implications in the intelligence product forces them to remain unaware of the fine points of the policy focus.

If the intelligence analyst is to help the policy maker he must himself understand the details of the policy issue under consideration. Perhaps this is why intelligence has been most successful when it has been part of a working group. Where analysts from the intelligence community can sit at a table with policy makers and assess options, intelligence producers can better understand what information would be truly supportive. A major stumbling block has been the Washington community's proclivity for leaks, causing policy makers to try to keep policy intentions under tight wraps, at times to the detriment of intelligence.

Where intelligence tends to provide the policy maker with the best support is on those issues where there has been a long standing series of questions and where a substantial body of data has been amassed. Where intelligence is often caught short is in a crisis or sudden areas of new interest. In those cases, demand for a memo by the end of the day allows no lead-time for intelligence to set its collection and processing apparatus into motion.

No amount of good intelligence analysis will rescue a bad policy. Every new administration comes into office with an announced set of policies, although the particulars have yet to be defined. How is intelligence to get policy makers to come to it before they present their policy intentions? Perhaps this is more of a marketing problem. In any event, a clear distinction must be made between questions asked of intelligence before policy is formulated and those asked to enable policy to be implemented.

Intelligence cannot be held accountable for the failure of a policy based on motivations of which it was not aware. For example, in the case of Conventional Arms Transfers, was the standard of "success" the reduction of the arms flow or

the maintenance of the moral status of the United States? It is not the job of intelligence to say that a policy will not succeed. Instead it is the role of intelligence to make clear the range of uncertainty and the potential difficulties associated with a policy. While intelligence analysts are not to advocate policy, they should not be afraid to illuminate policy implications.

It was then reiterated that the key to a more effective relationship is communication -- preferably dialogue -- and feedback. Yet, how is this to be achieved? Institutions set up to handle these communication problems will fail if the humans involved are not sufficiently flexible and dynamic in making the system work effectively. Policy makers must be convinced that it is worth their time to participate in such dialogue. For, as one policy maker has observed, there may indeed be a positive correlation between the time taken for discussions over lunch and the effectiveness of communication.

III. Outlook

This seminar was organized to address the question of whether or not it was possible or even desirable to construct a doctrine to guide the intelligence producer-consumer relationship. Several participants felt that the establishment of a rigid framework would not be useful since what is depicted by theory is often not encountered in practice. Others thought that is was time for the intelligence community to make up its mind and come to some mutually acceptable doctrinal understanding which would clarify the link between policy and intelligence.

The participants in this seminar exhibited an overwhelmingly activist philosophy in discussing the degree of interaction deemed necessary between intelligence producers and consumers. This response was recognized, however, as being an uneven representation of the two theoretical positions and not an implication that the traditionalist school -- those who favor more distance between intelligence producers and policy makers -- does not exist. There seems to be a fear among many junior analysts of getting "too close" to policy makers -- that to do so would subject them to the pressures of policy and in some way put their jobs on the line. At present, the Agency does not teach formally an intelligence producer-consumer doctrine. Some participants felt that such a doctrine should not be "taught," but should be learned in the context of on-the-job contacts.

Intelligence is seen as functioning in a new period of history. The issues it is being asked to analyze are more complex than ever before, often blurring the traditionally acknowledged boundary between domestic and foreign concerns. With events themselves in such flux, it was concluded by the participants that now is a good time at least for a restatement of what is known or believed to be known about this relationship.

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Next 2 Page(s) In Document Exempt